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THE TRYSTING PLACE

A Farce in One Act

By
BOOTH TARKINGTON

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THE PEOPLE AS THEY COME INTO THE PLAY

MRS. CURTIS, *The Young Woman, twenty-five or perhaps even a little older.*

LANCELOT BRIGGS, *The Boy, slim and obviously under twenty.*

MRS. BRIGGS, *his mother, a handsome woman of forty-five or fifty.*

JESSIE, *his sister, a pretty girl of about twenty.*

RUPERT SMITH, *The Young Man, about twenty-five.*

MR. INGOLDSBY, *a man of fifty-five or, possibly, sixty.*

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE, *male and adult.*

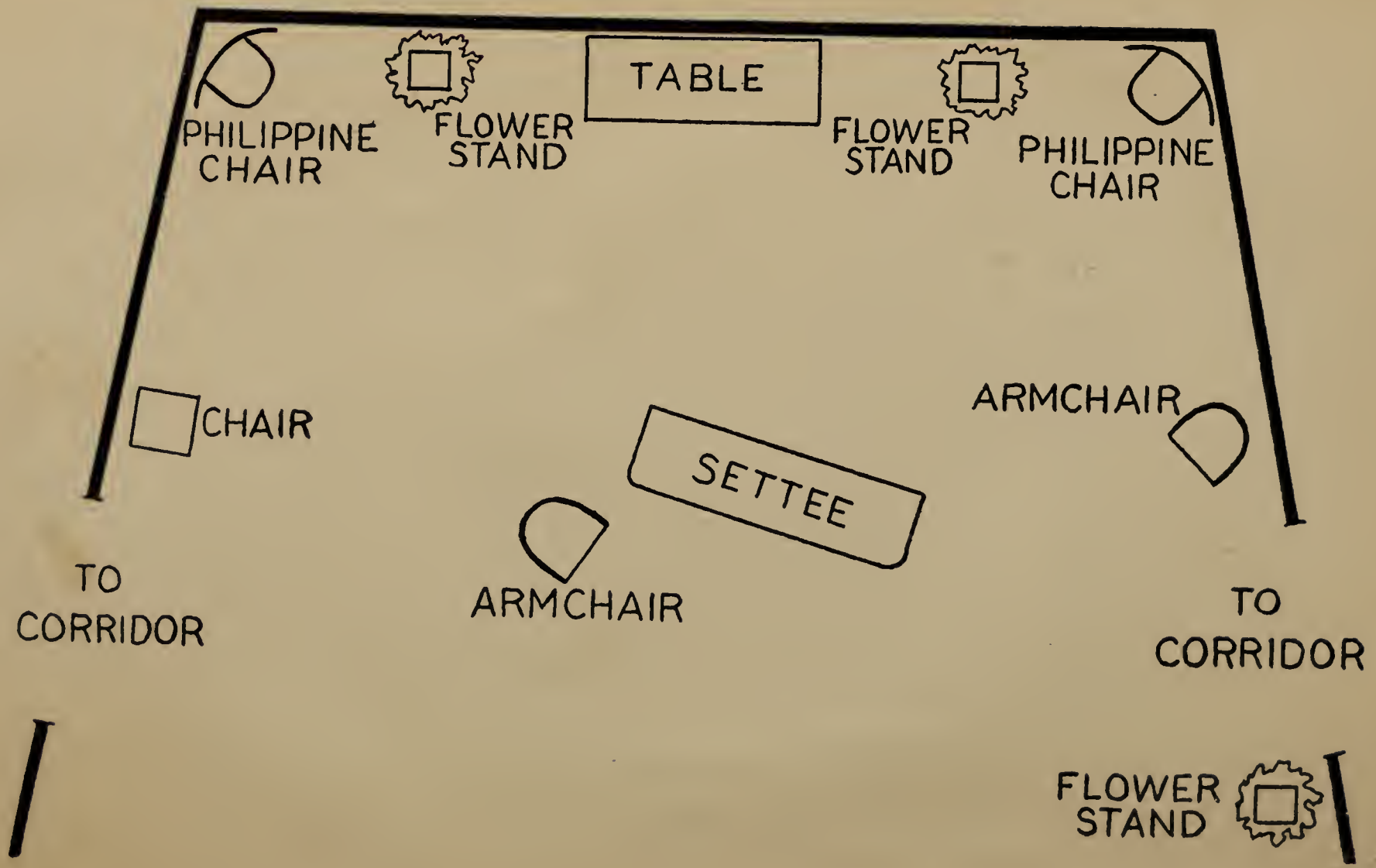
TABLE
PHILIPPINE CHAIR
FLOWER STAND
FLOWER STAND
PHILIPPINE CHAIR
CHAIR
ARMCHAIR
SETTEE
ARMCHAIR
TO CORRIDOR
TO CORRIDOR
FLOWER STAND

THE TRYSTING PLACE

The scene is a room just off the "lounge" of a hotel in the country. However, this is not a "country hotel;" but, on the contrary, one of those vast and elaborate houses of entertainment that affect an expensive simplicity in what is called the colonial manner, and ask to be visited—by those financially able to do so—in the general interest of health and the outdoor life. The wall at the back of the stage is broken only by symmetrically spaced pilasters of an ivory color; each of the side walls is broken in the same manner; but here the pilasters help to frame two rather broad entrances, one at the right and one at the left, and beyond these entrances, on both sides, we have glimpses of the two corridors that lead to them. There are a few old prints—or new prints from old plates—upon the walls; and there are flowering plants on stands in the corners. The furniture consists of some chintz-covered easy-chairs, a light wicker settee with a chintz cushion and a valance that reaches the floor; and there are two wicker tables with a vase of jonquils upon each of them. In the rear right-hand corner of the room, near the stand of plants, there is a tropical-looking chair, wicker, with a back of monstrous size—a Philippine Island chair—and in the opposite corner is its mate.

Dance music is heard from a distant orchestra. Just after the rise of the curtain two people come in together from the left—a young woman

of twenty-five, or perhaps she is even a little older, and a slim boy obviously under twenty. She is rather elaborate in her afternoon indoor dress, but none the less effectively pretty; he is of a scrubbed and sleeked youthfulness, in white trousers, a short black coat and dancing shoes; and from the moment of his first appearance he is seen to be in an extremity of love. He leans as near the young woman as he can; his eyes search her face yearningly and without intermission; he caroms into her slightly as they come in, and repeats the carom unwittingly. They have evidently just come from the dancing floor and are a little flushed; she fans herself with her handkerchief and he fans her with his. They are heard talking before they enter: "Oh, let's do find some place to sit down!" she is saying; and he, simultaneously: "Oh, wasn't that divine! You dance just simply divinely!" These speeches "bring them on."

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Here's a place we can sit down! (*She immediately drops into a chair.*)

THE BOY

Yes, this is a lovely place, where nobody is at all. It's the only quiet place in the hotel: you never see more than two people here at a time, because it's kind of off, like this. That's why I wanted to walk this way. (*Sitting on a lounge and leaning toward her.*) Isn't it divine to be in a place where nobody is at *all?*

THE YOUNG WOMAN (*still fanning herself*)

Why, you and I are here.

THE BOY

Yes; but I mean nobody else at all. We're practically all alone, practically.

THE YOUNG WOMAN (*laughing as she waves her hand to indicate the spacious corridors to the right and left*)

Alone? Why, there are at least three hundred people in this hotel.

THE BOY

Yes, but they're all either outdoors, or dancin', or havin' tea, right now. It's practically the same as being alone. It is—practically, I mean.

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Yes, I've noticed that it was a rather secluded spot myself. (*She glances about the room thoughtfully, then turns to him, smiling.*) Don't you want to run and dance with some of those pretty young girls your own age?

THE BOY (*with pained earnestness*)

Them? My goodness, no!

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Oh, but that isn't normal, is it?

THE BOY

I'm not normal. I don't want to be normal.

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Well, but it would only be natural for you to like those pretty young things, so— Well, *do* run and dance with one of 'em. Won't you, please?

THE BOY (*interrupting*)

No. They haven't got any experience of life. What I like is a woman that's had some experience of life, like you.

THE YOUNG WOMAN
But at your age—

THE BOY
Age hasn't got anything to do with it. The thing that brings a man and a woman together, it's when they have about the same amount of experience of life.

THE YOUNG WOMAN (*absently*)
You think that's it, Mr. Briggs? (*She looks about the room thoughtfully as she speaks.*)

MR. BRIGGS (*with intense seriousness*)
I know it is. I had that feeling the minute I was introduced to you, night before last in the lobby—right by the third column beyond the office news stand, at a quarter after nine o'clock in the evening.

THE YOUNG WOMAN
You did?

MR. BRIGGS
It came over me, and I felt kind of— (*he swallows*) kind of drawn to you, Missuz—Missuz —Missuz— (*He seems to hesitate somewhat emotionally.*)

THE YOUNG WOMAN
My name is Mrs. Curtis. You seem to have forgotten it.

MR. BRIGGS (*swallowing again*)
I haven't. I know it's Curtis. The trouble is, it kind of upsets me to call you *Missuz* Curtis. I thought it was Miss Curtis when I was introduced to you. I didn't know your name was Missuz—Missuz—Missuz Curtis till the clerk told me, early the next morning.

MRS. CURTIS (*frowning a little*)
The clerk told you?

MR. BRIGGS
Yes. I asked him if he'd noticed whether you'd gone in to breakfast yet. He said, "You mean Missuz—Missuz Curtis?" Then I knew you must be married. (*He shakes his head ruefully.*)

MRS. CURTIS (*smiling*)
Well?

MR. BRIGGS (*thoughtfully*)
Well, it can't be helped.

MRS. CURTIS
I suppose not.

MR. BRIGGS (*brightening a little*)
Well, anyhow, I had that—that sort of *drawn* feeling toward you, the way I *would* get toward a woman that's had some experience of life; but a hotel like this is no place to explain feelings like that. You can't when you're dancing —not the way you want to—and all the rest of the time you had some o' those *old* men hangin' around, or else my mother and sister wanted me for something; because a hotel like this—why, it's terrible the way a young man's mother and sister want him to do somep'n for 'em *all* the time; so this is the first chance I've had.

MRS. CURTIS (*rather urgently*)
Don't you really think you'd better be dancing with some of those young things yonder?

MR. BRIGGS (*puzzled*)
Think I'd *better* be?

MRS. CURTIS
Yes; I do really wish you would. Wouldn't it

be a lot more fun than explaining something, as you said, to me?

MR. BRIGGS (*hurriedly*)
No. No, it wouldn't. I want to explain how I feel about you.

MRS. CURTIS
Please go and dance, Mr. Briggs. I think it would be *much* better if you—

MR. BRIGGS (*rapidly*)
No, it wouldn't. I want to explain how I feel about you, so you'll understand. It's like this, Missuz (*swallowing again*) Missuz Curtis. I never used to think I'd ever get to feeling this way about—about somebody that was married, but it—it came over me before I knew you *were* married. I already *was* feeling this way before he said, "You mean—you mean Missuz Curtis?" It'd already—(*he swallows*) happened to me before I knew you were a—a married woman. (*Shaking his head.*) I certainly never *did* think I'd feel this way about a married woman.

MRS. CURTIS
But I'm not—not as you mean it. I'm a widow, Mr. Briggs.

MR. BRIGGS (*as in a dim perplexity*)
A wid— You're a widow? (*He jumps up suddenly, greatly amazed.*) Oh, my!

MRS. CURTIS
What's the matter?

MR. BRIGGS
Oh, my!

MRS. CURTIS
What is it?

MR. BRIGGS

I guess I've got to get used to the idea of it. First I thought you weren't married, and then I was just gettin' used to the idea that you *were,* and now—well, I s'pose it's a good deal better, your bein' a widow, though, except—except for—

MRS. CURTIS

Except for?

MR. BRIGGS (*hurriedly*)

Oh, I didn't mean except for your *husband!* I didn't mean your bein' a widow was better for—(*He checks himself and swallows.*)

MRS. CURTIS

Oh!

MR. BRIGGS (*frowning with thought*)

No. I meant more on account of the way my family treats me. My mother and sister—well, to tell the truth, they always seem to think I'm about four years old. They can't seem to *realize;* and when I go and tell 'em you're a *widow*—

MRS. CURTIS

You think they'll be interested in hearing it? I haven't even met them.

MR. BRIGGS

No, but—but of course they've been *talkin'* about you quite a good deal.

MRS. CURTIS

They have?

MR. BRIGGS

You know how people are in a hotel like this: wondering who everybody else *is,* and whether some woman's some old man's wife or his

daughter or just a trained nurse, and all so on. Of course my family noticed *you* right away and then after I *met* you of course then they said a *lot* more about you. Golly! (*He shakes his head, indicating that the comment has been unfavorable.*)

MRS. CURTIS
Oh, indeed!

MR. BRIGGS (*ruefully*)
They watch me like a hawk, and I know what they'll say now! When I tell 'em you're a widow, I mean.

MRS. CURTIS
Do you?

MR. BRIGGS (*shaking his head*)
I certainly never thought myself I would ever get to feeling this way about a widow *either!*

MRS. CURTIS
Don't you *really* think you'd better run and dance with one of those—

MR. BRIGGS (*absently*)
No. (*Turning to her suddenly.*) I was goin' to ask you—well, of course, in a—a technical way, so to speak, I mean in a strickly technical way, so to speak, I'm not exactly of age yet, and I suppose I'd have to get my mother's consent, because *she's* a widow, too, and got herself appointed my guardian besides; and the truth is, she's a pretty cold-hearted, bossy kind of a woman, and it's goin' to be a big difficulty gettin' her to see this thing right.

MRS. CURTIS
To see *what* right?

MR. BRIGGS

The way I feel about you. I know it's goin' to be difficult, because I started to talk a little about it last night to my mother and my sister—her name's Jessie—and they behaved—well, they behaved a good deal like two fiends.

MRS. CURTIS

They did?

MR. BRIGGS

I told 'em they didn't know you, and they *haven't* even *met* you, but they treated me like a—like a mere *jest;* and then they got so critical, the way they talked about you, it might be better if they didn't see me with you again for a few days. I can't stand the way they talk after they see me with you.

MRS. CURTIS

Indeed!

MR. BRIGGS

Well, what I was saying: I can't touch my principal till I'm twenty-one on account of the way my father went and tied up his will; but of course my mother and sister think a good many'll be after me on account of it; but, anyhow, I *have* got to feeling this way, and I know I'll *never* get over it, so what I wanted to ask you—well, it's—it's—(*he swallows*) it's just this: I know you *are* a widow and everything like that, but would you be willing to—(*he swallows*) well, of course I don't know how long since you lost your first husband—

MRS. CURTIS (*incredulously*)

What! (*She rises.*)

MR. BRIGGS

I mean I—I don't know how you *would* feel about gettin' married again yet, even if I didn't have my own difficulties about it, but—but—

MRS. CURTIS (*with increased incredulity*)

Are you *proposing* to me, Mr. Briggs?

MR. BRIGGS

Well—uh—yes. (*Then, looking beyond her down the corridor on the right.*) Oh, goodness. They watch me like a hawk! Here comes my mother! (*Dismayed, he turns to the left.*)

MRS. CURTIS (*as he turns*)

Perhaps it was time!

MR. BRIGGS (*dismally*)

There's my sister Jessie!

MRS. CURTIS

What of it?

MR. BRIGGS (*hastily*)

I told you they behave like two fiends when they see me with you. (*Glancing right and left nervously.*) Well, excuse me. (*With perfect gravity he kneels at one end of the settee, which is in the rear, a little left of "center."*) It'll be a good deal better if they don't see me, I expect. (*He promptly crawls under the settee, and the valance conceals him entirely. From this invisibility he appeals with pathetic urgency in a hoarse whisper*): They'll prob'ly go right on. *Please* wait! Or—if you *haf* to go, come *back!*

(*Mrs. Curtis stands dumbfounded for a moment; and then, controlling a tendency to laugh immoderately, she turns to examine a print on the left wall as Mr. Briggs's mother enters from*

the right. Mrs. Briggs is a handsome woman of forty-five or fifty, not now in a gracious mood. She comes in decisively, halts, and stares at Mrs. Curtis' back. Then she looks over the room in an annoyed and puzzled manner. Mr. Briggs's sister Jessie comes in from the left. She is a pretty girl of about twenty, but her expression is now rather cross. Her dress and equipment show that she has just come in from the golf course.)

JESSIE (*calling as she comes in*)
Lancelot! (*She halts, puzzled, and looks inquiringly at her mother.*) Mamma, where's Lancelot? I was sure I saw him in here just a second ago.

MRS. BRIGGS (*grimly*)
So was I. (*After looking at each other, they turn their heads simultaneously and stare at Mrs. Curtis, who appears to be interested in the print.*) It's very odd!

JESSIE
Yes, very.

(*The two again look at each other, and at a little distance appear to consult telepathically, without any change of expression; then they turn once more to look at Mrs. Curtis.*)

MRS. BRIGGS
I beg your pardon, but I'm under the impression that you have met my son.

MRS. CURTIS (*turning*)
Yes?

JESSIE
Wasn't he here just now?

MRS. CURTIS
Yes, he was.

MRS. BRIGGS
Would you be good enough to tell me, did he leave here to go to his room?

MRS. CURTIS (*casually*)
I don't think so; he didn't say so. (*She gives them a little nod, smiling politely, and goes out at the left. They stare after her.*)

JESSIE (*still staring after Mrs. Curtis*)
She's a very bold type.

MRS. BRIGGS (*seating herself on the settee*)
Very.

JESSIE (*turning to her*)
I don't see how that little goose got away. You were coming from that direction and I from just yonder. I suppose he thought we'd say something that would embarrass him before her.

MRS. BRIGGS
I suppose she's thirty-five. I've heard of such people, but I never saw one before.

JESSIE
I regard her as distinctly the dangerous type of adventuress.

MRS. BRIGGS
Certainly. In the first place, her not having told the child frankly that she's a widow. One of the clerks told *me* she *was*.

JESSIE
Oh, she did that to flatter him into believing he's a real grown-up "man of the world" having an "affair"!

MRS. BRIGGS

So that when he's sufficiently entangled she can tell him she's a widow—and by that time we don't know *what* he'd do! A country justice of the peace probably!

JESSIE

Last night, when we were trying to teach him a little common sense about strange people in hotels, what was it he said she was? "An angel!"—oh, yes!—"One of heaven's highest angels."

MRS. BRIGGS (*grimly*)

He said he wouldn't "listen to one of heaven's highest angels gettin' talked against by a lot o' women!" I'm sure they heard him in the next suite. (*She rises.*) I suppose you'd better go and see where he slipped out to, Jessie. Of course, he'll try to find *her* again as soon as he can.

JESSIE (*dropping into a chair*)

I played three times round the course. Do you mind if I just sit here a while and rest?

MRS. BRIGGS

Then why don't you go to your room?

JESSIE (*laughing feebly*)

I'm just too tired. I will in a minute. (*With a gesture toward the left entrance.*) Hadn't you better—

MRS. BRIGGS

Keep her in sight? Yes. That's easier than trying to keep *him* in sight. You're going up to your room right away, aren't you?

JESSIE

Yes, in only a minute. I really think you'd better go, Mamma. He might—

MRS. BRIGGS
No, I'll see to that! (*She goes out.*)

(*Jessie stares after her for a moment, glances at a wrist watch, then rises and looks down the corridor beyond the entrance at the right. She appears to derive some satisfaction from what she sees there, returns to her chair and sits in a carefully graceful attitude, her expression demure. A moment later a young man—he is about twenty-five—comes in rather nervously from the right. He pauses near the entrance.*)

THE YOUNG MAN
You!

JESSIE (*softly*)
You!

THE YOUNG MAN
Is your mother—

JESSIE
She's gone.

THE YOUNG MAN (*nervously advancing*)
I—I—

JESSIE
I was afraid maybe we couldn't have this nook to ourselves, after all. My absurd little brother was in here, hanging about that dreadful Mrs. Curtis, and I was afraid they wouldn't go away; but Mamma scared 'em both off providentially.

THE YOUNG MAN (*moving a chair close to hers and sitting*)
And so we're alone! (*He speaks with a sentimental hushedness.*) All alone!

JESSIE
All alone, Rupert! This is the only place in the

hotel where you *can* be by yourself a while. That's why I said to meet here.

RUPERT (*nervously*)
You don't think your mother'll be back for a while?

JESSIE
No; she won't.

RUPERT
She hasn't found out I've come, has she?

JESSIE
She hasn't the remotest idea, thank heaven! Nobody dreams you're within hundreds of miles of here. That's one advantage of a big hotel.

RUPERT
Darling—

JESSIE
Yes, darling?

(*The settee moves slightly at this, but it is behind them and they do not see it.*)

RUPERT
I can't understand why your mother dislikes me so.

JESSIE (*gravely*)
Well, I suppose her feeling about you is—well, she *says* it's because you're rather poor and I'm —not.

RUPERT
But what makes her think I care about you because you're not?

JESSIE
Well—

RUPERT (*leaning toward her and lowering his voice*)
Darling, there's something I want to ask you—

JESSIE (*leaning toward him and almost whispering*)
Yes, dearest, what is it?

(*The settee slowly moves nearer them as their voices become more indistinct.*)

RUPERT
I want to ask you—

JESSIE
Yes?

RUPERT (*with hushed tenderness*)
Do you *really* love me, dearest?

JESSIE (*gazing upward, tranced*)
Oh, dearest, I do!

(*The settee goes back to where it came from.*)

RUPERT
But you don't think your mother'll ever change her mind about me?

JESSIE
She never does change her mind.

RUPERT
Then what can we do?

JESSIE (*in a low voice*)
Darling, there's something I wouldn't say for anything in the world to anybody but you.

(*The settee again approaches slightly.*)

RUPERT
Yes?

JESSIE

I think Mamma really knows you're not mercenary, but the *real* reason for her opposition to you is pretty selfish. I think it's because she doesn't want me to marry and go away and leave her alone in the world.

RUPERT

But she wouldn't be. She'd still have the companionship of your young brother.

JESSIE (*shaking her head*)

That'd be the same as none. Lancelot seems to have scarcely *any* sense, you see.

(*The settee once more retires.*)

RUPERT

Then I don't see what possible hope—

JESSIE (*warning him as she sees someone approaching in the corridor to the right*)

Sh-h-h!

RUPERT (*following her gaze*)

Who *is* that old chap?

JESSIE

It's old Mr. Ingoldsby. He's some old friend of mamma's that happened to turn up here.

RUPERT (*moving as if to withdraw*)

I'd better—

JESSIE (*quickly*)

No; he doesn't know you. Sit still. (*She turns toward Mr. Ingoldsby with a smile as he enters.*) Good afternoon, Mr. Ingoldsby. Did you do it in eighty-five again today?

(*Ingoldsby is a man of fifty-five or, possibly, sixty. He wears neat knickerbockers and is*

otherwise sprightly in his outdoor attire. He smiles rather absently as he replies.)

INGOLDSBY
Eighty-five? No, I—ah—no. I didn't go round today. Ah—has Mrs. Briggs been here?

JESSIE
Here?

INGOLDSBY
Yes, I mean—ah—here.

JESSIE
I think she's somewhere looking for Lancelot.

INGOLDSBY
Yes? Ah—I—

JESSIE
Is there something you'd like me to tell her when I see her?

INGOLDSBY (*going toward the left entrance*)
No; I—I— (*He glances at his watch, and looks absently at Jessie.*) No, I believe I—ah— (*He departs.*)

RUPERT
Well, I *do* hope nobody else'll come poking about like that, because I—

JESSIE
No, darling; we're alone again now.

RUPERT
Darling—

JESSIE
Yes, darling?

RUPERT
We've had such difficulties in managing our little interviews; it does seem a precious thing to be near you again.

JESSIE
Oh, it does!

RUPERT
If we could only go away together, where it could *always* be like this—

JESSIE (*dreamily*)
Yes, with the world shut out.

RUPERT
Why can't we—

JESSIE
Hush, darling.

(*She sees someone approaching in the corridor on the left. He looks dolefully in that direction.*)

JESSIE
It's that dreadful woman.

RUPERT
I don't know her.

JESSIE
She's been trying to entangle Lancelot, and he's completely lost what slight intelligence he *had*, the little ninny! She's old enough to be his mother.

(*The settee makes a slight convulsive movement.*)

RUPERT
Sh! She'll hear you.

(*Mrs. Curtis enters from the left. She looks about, with a faint embarrassment. Jessie stares at her, then speaks coldly.*)

JESSIE

I beg your pardon. Did you leave something when you were here with my little brother?

MRS. CURTIS (*smiling constrainedly*)

Did you happen to see a pair of white gloves?

(*Rupert rises and looks in his chair.*)

JESSIE

No. There aren't any here.

MRS. CURTIS

I *may* have left them anywhere of course. (*To Rupert*) Don't bother, please. I thought just possibly— (*She stoops slightly and looks behind the settee, and her expression shows a considerable illumination.*) If I *had* left anything here I just wanted to see if it was still—

JESSIE

No; there aren't any gloves here. (*She speaks in a sharp whisper to Rupert.*) Sit down! (*He does so. Their backs are toward Mrs. Curtis.*)

MRS. CURTIS

No. They don't seem to be. I'm sorry to have disturbed you.

(*She moves toward the left entrance as she speaks. The settee follows her. She checks it with a sudden commanding push.*)

JESSIE

I hardly think my little brother will come back *here*. My mother went to look for him.

MRS. CURTIS (*politely*)

No doubt she's found him by this time.

(*She looks from the settee to Jessie and Rupert, and back again; and her eyes widen with an intense inward struggle.*)

JESSIE (*turning to look at her coolly*)
Was there anything else?

MRS. CURTIS (*after a moment, during which her inward struggle prevents her from replying*)
Oh—oh, no! I'm so sorry to have disturbed you! (*Her voice threatens to break and she goes out hurriedly, at the left.*)

JESSIE (*staring after her*)
Absolutely brazen! She came back after that idiot *boy!* Thought *he'd* probably come back!

RUPERT
Darling—

JESSIE (*turning to him eagerly*)
Yes, darling—

RUPERT (*looking over her shoulder*)
Oh, my goodness! (*He speaks with intense anguish.*)

JESSIE (*seizing his hand feverishly*)
What's the matter, darling?

RUPERT (*rising*)
It's your mother! (*He strides hastily backward out of sight from the left entrance.*)

JESSIE
Oh, murder!

RUPERT
She didn't see me, but she will if I try to go out there. (*He points to the right entrance.*)

JESSIE
She's coming!

RUPERT
This is awful! (*His despairing eye falls upon the huge Philippine chair in the left rear corner of the room; he rushes to it, turns it round, with*

its back toward the front, and sits in it, concealed from view. He speaks in a hoarse whisper.) Darling—

JESSIE

Hush! (*She has checked an impulse to rise and fly; and now, affecting carelesness, she brushes her left sleeve with her right hand, crosses her knees, swings her foot, whistles an operatic air and looks at the ceiling. Mrs. Briggs enters at the left, frowning. Jessie addresses her cheerfully.*) Back again, Mamma? Where's Lancelot?

MRS. BRIGGS (*in an annoyed tone*)

I don't know. I thought you were going straight to your room.

JESSIE

Oh, I am.

MRS. BRIGGS

Have you just been sitting here alone?

JESSIE

Mrs. Curtis came back a minute ago looking for the child.

MRS. BRIGGS

Yes; I saw *her*. Wasn't anyone else—

JESSIE (*carelessly*)

Oh, yes; that Mr. Ingoldsby was here, too.

MRS. BRIGGS

He was? (*She looks at her watch and then toward the corridor on the left.*) You told me you were very tired and were going straight to your room.

JESSIE (*casually*)

Oh, well, I feel rested now.

MRS. BRIGGS

You should lie down before dressing for dinner.

JESSIE

Why don't *you* do that, Mamma? You know how it brightens you up.

MRS. BRIGGS (*frowning*)

Brightens me up? Really!

JESSIE

Oh, I don't mean like a *terribly* aged person; but a nap every day's a good thing for everybody.

MRS. BRIGGS (*stiffly*)

I *took* a nap after lunch. Really, it's time you went.

JESSIE

Oh, I'll just sit around a while longer. I rather like to just sit around and do nothing, like this.

MRS. BRIGGS

You *said* you were going, and you ought to do things when you say you're going to do them.

JESSIE

But *why?* Why can't I just sit around here a little longer if I want to?

MRS. BRIGGS

Because you said you—

JESSIE

Oh, what if I did! Haven't I got a right to change my mind?

MRS. BRIGGS

I insist on your lying down for half an hour before you dress for dinner. What makes you so obstinate about it? Have you any *reason* for wishing not to do this simple thing? Is there

anything you're trying to conceal from me, Jessie?

JESSIE (*rising hastily*)
Certainly not!

MRS. BRIGGS (*severely*)
You haven't any particular reason for staying here and not going to your room as you said you would?

JESSIE
No!

MRS. BRIGGS
Then—

JESSIE
Oh, I'll go; but I don't understand why you make such a point of it!

MRS. BRIGGS (*a little flustered*)
A point of it? I? I'm not making a point of it! I don't at all, except—except for your health.

JESSIE (*going*)
My *health!* (*She halts.*) What nonsense!

MRS. BRIGGS
Your health is the only thing to consider. You've started; why don't you *go?*

JESSIE
But what's the *hurry?*

MRS. BRIGGS
Hurry? Oh, none! I just meant, as you *are* going, why shouldn't you *go* and get it over?

JESSIE
What makes you so queer?

MRS. BRIGGS (*with quiet severity*)
Queer? You call your mother queer? It seems

to me you're the one that's behaving queerly. Jessie, is there anything you're trying to—

JESSIE

No! Don't get so upset. I'll go!

(*She goes out at the left. Mrs. Briggs stares after her for a moment; looks in the opposite direction; then seats herself upon the settee, and from the midst of a handkershief which she has crumpled in her hand produces a small gold vanity box. She opens it, gazes in the tiny mirror, touches her hair, glances right and left, and uses a diminutive powder puff quickly; then she closes the box, conceals it in her handkerchief again, and hums a song to herself. Mr. Ingoldsby enters at the left. He has an air slightly embarrassed.*)

MRS. BRIGGS (*as if surprised*)

Oh!

INGOLDSBY

Ah—I was here a while ago. It was a little earlier than our—our appointment; if I may call it so. (*He laughs nervously.*)

MRS. BRIGGS (*smiling*)

Well, I suppose it *could* be called an appointment—in a way.

INGOLDSBY

I—I thought—that is, I've noticed this was about the only place in the hotel where there aren't usually a lot of people. I suggested it because—because I had something to say—ah—I mean that I thought it would be as well to say it in private—as it were. That is, if we were alone together, I—ah—that is to say, it's

something I couldn't very well say in—in public, so to speak. I mean it would be difficult with other people present.

MRS. BRIGGS (*smiling nervously*)
Is it something very mysterious, Mr. Ingoldsby?

INGOLDSBY
I wish you wouldn't call me that.

MRS. BRIGGS (*seriously*)
You want me to call you Henry?

INGOLDSBY
You did once.

MRS. BRIGGS (*rising in some agitation*)
Yes, but that was pretty long ago.

INGOLDSBY (*sharply*)
I called you Fannie then.

MRS. BRIGGS (*more agitated*)
I don't think we should ever refer to it. When an episode is as long buried as—

INGOLDSBY (*his own agitation increasing*)
Episode? See here, Fannie; you know why I stayed a bachelor. You do know.

MRS. BRIGGS (*protesting quickly*)
No, no! I have no responsibility for that!

INGOLDSBY
Haven't you? When you broke your engagement to me—

MRS. BRIGGS (*crying out, though she suppresses the loudness of her voice*)
It was a misunderstanding, Henry.

INGOLDSBY
It was not. I've held my peace in silence all these years because of my principles. I wouldn't refer to such things with you when you had

become a married woman. But I can speak now. You deliberately broke off with me—

MRS. BRIGGS (*choking*)
I didn't!

INGOLDSBY (*with a suppressed passion*)
You did! (*He paces the floor as he goes on.*) You decided Lance Briggs was the better man, and you sent me my ring and letters without a single word explaining why you did it.

MRS. BRIGGS
Oh!

INGOLDSBY
You did!

MRS. BRIGGS
Is it fair to attack me with that now?

INGOLDSBY
Fair? How *dare* you speak of *fairness* to *me?*

MRS. BRIGGS
But you *knew* why I did it.

INGOLDSBY (*bitterly*)
I did indeed! It was simply because you were of a fickle nature. Of course you didn't have the courage to explain *that.*

MRS. BRIGGS (*with great emotion*)
But you don't know the pressure, the awful pressure my mother brought to bear on me. She simply *made* me marry him, Henry. It was night and day, day and night, week in, week out—

INGOLDSBY
And you never for one moment had the simple bravery, the simple *loyalty* to the man you'd given your word to—

MRS. BRIGGS
I was worn out. I was—

INGOLDSBY
You didn't care enough for me to—

MRS. BRIGGS
I *did!*

INGOLDSBY
No! No! No!

MRS. BRIGGS (*piteously*)
Henry, you *must* listen to me! (*She puts her hand on his arm.*)

INGOLDSBY (*moving away from her*)
Why didn't you say that *then?* Why didn't—

MRS. BRIGGS
I loved you—I did, Henry! I simply let my mother break my will and wreck our two lives.

INGOLDSBY
What folly! You were perfectly happy with Briggs. I don't know *how* many people told me you were.

MRS. BRIGGS
I did my duty, and I tried to do it cheerfully; but the scar was always there, Henry.

INGOLDSBY (*harshly*)
I don't believe it!

MRS. BRIGGS (*plaintively*)
It was, Henry. (*She sinks into the chair Jessie has occupied.*)

INGOLDSBY (*swallowing*)
What?

MRS. BRIGGS (*feebly*)
It was, Henry—the scar was always there. (*Her head droops.*)

(*He walks across the room, then returns to her and looks down upon her.*)

INGOLDSBY (*swallowing*)
Do you know what my life has been?

MRS. BRIGGS (*tremulously, not looking up*)
I—I heard you became very—very prosperous in—in real estate.

INGOLDSBY
Yes. What's that to fill a man's life? Look at the difference! You have children to be a comfort to you in your—your—as you approach middle age. I have nothing.

MRS. BRIGGS (*pathetically, still looking down*)
Oh, I'm sure you have something.

INGOLDSBY
I tell you I have nothing—nothing in the world to make life worth living, not a thing on earth! (*He glances about, then sits beside her and speaks in a very low voice.*) Fannie—Fannie—

(*The settee approaches a little nearer.*)

MRS. BRIGGS (*also in a very low voice*)
Well?

INGOLDSBY
Fannie—I—I—Fannie—I— (*His emotion is difficult to control and his voice fades out into a murmur of several slight incoherent sounds, whereupon the settee again moves slightly closer.*)

MRS. BRIGGS
Yes, Henry?

INGOLDSBY
You said your life was wrecked, though you

bore it dutifully and—and cheerfully. Mine—*my* life—it was withered!

MRS. BRIGGS (*murmuring*)
Oh—Henry!

INGOLDSBY
But, after all, our lives aren't over.

MRS. BRIGGS (*shaking her down-bent head and protesting in a weak voice*)
Oh, no, no! Don't begin to talk that way.

INGOLDSBY
Fannie, I never got over it. As time went on, I took up my work and tried to do my part in the world, but—but I never got over it, Fannie. I'm not over it now.

MRS. BRIGGS (*turning to him mournfully*)
Oh, yes, you are!

INGOLDSBY (*shaking his head*)
I'm not. I still—I still—I still—I still—

(*The settee again moves a little nearer.*)

MRS. BRIGGS
No, no.

INGOLDSBY
I do. I still—I still—

MRS. BRIGGS (*in a faint and tearful protest*)
No, you don't, Henry. You only think you do.

INGOLDSBY
No, I really do. I—I—I care for you yet, Fannie.

MRS. BRIGGS (*recovering herself enough to smile faintly as she shakes her head*)
Oh, my, no!

INGOLDSBY
Fannie, let's—let's save these years that we still have before us. Let's try to make up for that old mistake.

MRS. BRIGGS (*becoming a little brisker*)
Why, how—how—why, we—why, I couldn't think of such a thing!

INGOLDSBY (*solemnly*)
Fannie, I ask you to marry me.

(*She stares at him; the settee moves an inch nearer.*)

MRS. BRIGGS
What?

INGOLDSBY
I ask you to marry me.

MRS. BRIGGS
Why, good gracious! I wouldn't have my children know that anybody had said such a thing to me for all the kingdoms on earth!

INGOLDSBY (*earnestly*)
They need'nt know it till afterwards.

MRS. BRIGGS (*breathlessly*)
Afterwards? After—after—

INGOLDSBY
You're not going to wreck us both *again*, are you, Fannie?

MRS. BRIGGS (*as in amazement*)
Why, if I'd dreamed you were going to say anything like *this* to me when you asked me to meet you here this afternoon—

INGOLDSBY (*solemnly*)
Fannie, I want you to give me your answer, and to do it now. What do you say?

MRS. BRIGGS (*feebly, with her hand to her breast*)
Oh, my!

INGOLDSBY
Yes; you must.

MRS. BRIGGS
But I haven't had time to *think!* Why, I wouldn't have anybody know about this for—

INGOLDSBY
I want my answer, Fannie—Fannie, *dear!*

MRS. BRIGGS (*blankly*)
Oh, dear!

INGOLDSBY
Fannie, *dearest!* (*He takes her hand.*)

MRS. BRIGGS
Oh, I wouldn't have anybody know this—

INGOLDSBY
Dearest, dearest Fannie!

MRS. BRIGGS
Why, I wouldn't have anybody know that we—

(*They are interrupted by a voice from a mysterious and invisible source. It is a male and adult voice, loudly and emphatically affecting to clear the throat of its origin in the manner of a person wishing to attract the attention of some other person.*)

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE
A-hem! A-a-a-*hem!*

MRS. BRIGGS (*leaping in her chair*)
Good heavens!

INGOLDSBY (*jumping up*)
What was that?

MRS. BRIGGS (*rising*)
Why, it was a man's voice.

INGOLDSBY
It was right here in the room with us.

MRS. BRIGGS (*sinking into her chair*)
Oh, murder!

INGOLDSBY (*staring about the room, notices the Philippine chair with its back turned to the front*)
There's somebody sitting in that chair! (*He starts toward it angrily, but is checked by a suppressed scream from Mrs. Briggs.*)

MRS. BRIGGS
Don't! I'd *much* rather never know who it is. (*Rising.*) Let's get away! (*She totters.*)

INGOLDSBY (*undecided, but very angry*)
We ought to know who's spying on us like this.

MRS. BRIGGS (*clutching at him*)
Oh!

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE (*indignantly*)
I'm not spying! This is a public room in a public hotel—

MRS. BRIGGS (*moaning*)
Oh!

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE (*continuing*)
Any guest of this hotel has a right to sit here in peace, and if you *will* go on talking about your private affairs in a public room—

MRS. BRIGGS (*leaning on Ingoldsby's arm*)
Oh, my!

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE (*continuing heatedly*)
Why, it's your own fault, not mine. I was only warning you not to go any further. I've heard enough of other people's private affairs for one afternoon, anyhow.

MRS. BRIGGS (*almost hysterically*)
Oh, let's go! (*She swings the reluctant and angry Ingoldsby toward the left entrance.*) Let's *go!*

INGOLDSBY (*turning to call back angrily*)
I don't know who you are, sir; but when I've seen this lady to a—a place of safety—I *intend* to know. I'll be *back* here, sir.

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE
Fine!

MRS. BRIGGS
Oh, mercy! (*She moves hastily away from Ingoldsby as Jessie suddenly comes in, from the left, confronting them.*)

JESSIE (*halting sharply*)
What in the world's the matter?

MRS. BRIGGS (*in a shaking voice*)
Nothing! Nothing at all, Jessie. Why should you think anything's the matter?

JESSIE
Why, you're all upset!

MRS. BRIGGS (*trying hard to seem lightly amused, and failing*)
Not at all—not at all! I was just sitting here a moment with Mr. Ingoldsby, chatting over old times and—and then we decided to leave. We decided to leave—that's all. I—I'm— (*Suddenly she starts, and with an incoherent exclamation looks behind her. Then she faces Jessie and, with a painful effort to smile, completes her sentence.*) I'm all right.

JESSIE
Yes, you seem so. Mr. Ingoldsby, will you

kindly tell me what you've been saying to my mother to upset her so?

MRS. BRIGGS
But I'm not—

INGOLDSBY (*checking her sharply*)
Miss Briggs, I should not be likely to say anything disrespectful to my old and dear friend, your mother. (*Looking around angrily.*) The truth is, there's an eavesdropping scoundrel concealed in this room, and I—

JESSIE (*alarmed*)
What! Oh, I'm *sure* there isn't.

INGOLDSBY
There is! An eavesdropping—

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE (*angrily*)
This is a public room, I told you. How can *I* help it if you—

INGOLDSBY
I can't stand this. He's behind that chair.

(*He breaks away from Mrs. Briggs and Jessie, who both clutch at him.*)

JESSIE (*crying out*)
Don't! *Please* don't!

MRS. BRIGGS (*simultaneously*)
Henry! *Don't!*

(*But Ingoldsby has already reached the Philippine chair that has its back turned toward the front of the stage; he seizes Rupert by the collar and drags him forth. Rupert is horrified.*)

INGOLDSBY
Come out of there, you scoundrel. Come out to the light of day.

RUPERT (*hastily*)
I didn't do it. It wasn't *me*.

MRS. BRIGGS
Rupert Smith!

JESSIE (*dolefully*)
Oh, goodness!

INGOLDSBY (*hotly*)
What do you mean by terrorizing a lady?

RUPERT
I didn't! I didn't say a *word!* I *was* behind there, but I couldn't help it. It wasn't *my* voice talking to you.

INGOLDSBY
Then who was it?

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE
If you're anxious for more witnesses, I suggest that you look under the settee. table!

MRS. BRIGGS (*changing her mind as she is in the act of sinking down upon the settee*)
What!

JESSIE
Look at it!

(*Mrs. Briggs screams faintly, as the settee moves rapidly to the left entrance, evidently meaning to leave the room.*)

INGOLDSBY (*to Rupert*)
Stop that thing! Catch it!

(*They seize the settee just as it is disappearing into the corridor. They drag it back into the room.*)

RUPERT (*trying to lift the settee*)
Come out from under there!

INGOLDSBY
Come out, now!

THE SETTEE
I won't! You lea' me alone!

INGOLDSBY
Both together now—heave!

(*They heave, and the settee yields, disclosing Lancelot with his previously smooth hair disheveled and his clothes well rumpled.*)

MRS. BRIGGS (*astonished*)
Lancelot! Oh, gracious me!

INGOLDSBY (*to Lancelot*)
Shame on you!

RUPERT
Yes, shame on you!

LANCELOT (*resentfully*)
Well, you *would* get me; but I'll make you sorry you did it, both of you! (*He rises, brushing himself and adjusting his attire.*)

INGOLDSBY (*irritably*)
Don't you know better than to frighten ladies and eavesdrop and—

LANCELOT (*warmly*)
I was abs'lootly honorable, because I couldn't help it, and you none of you ever gave me a single chance to get away. *My* conduct is the only one here that hasn't got a stain on it or anything. (*He turns hotly upon Mrs. Briggs and Jessie.*) I got nothing to reproach myself with, but I'd just like to know what either of you got to say for yourselves *now* about the way you been talkin' about Mrs. Curtis! If you either of you ever just *dare* to soil your

lips with even her *name* again, why, I know more *things*—

MRS. BRIGGS

Be quiet, Lancelot.

LANCELOT

Quiet? *Me?* (*He laughs shortly with an irony he could not express in words.*) In the first place, don't call me Lancelot any more. You know how I hate that name, and I been tryin' to break you of it long enough—and now I will! I don't care what you call me, but don't call me *that!*

JESSIE (*pointing to the settee*)

How long were you under there?

LANCELOT (*sternly*)

Long enough to get mighty tired of hearin' people callin' each other "Darling"! Good gracious! You don't think I *enjoyed* it, do you? Why, what I heard while I was under there—well, I got a pretty strong constitution, but—

MRS. BRIGGS

Hush! Oh, me!

INGOLDSBY

The voice that spoke didn't sound like Lancelot's voice—

LANCELOT (*turning upon him ominously*)

Did you hear me say not to call me Lancelot? I mean you, too.

INGOLDSBY (*with hasty meekness*)

I'll call you anything you like; but I want to know who it was that *spoke.* You say it wasn't you—

LANCELOT (*very emphatically*)
No, it wasn't. I wouldn't 'a' told you to look under the settee, would I?

INGOLDSBY (*with a gesture toward Rupert*)
And this gentleman says it wasn't he.

RUPERT
Why, it spoke again after I came out.

INGOLDSBY (*quite bewildered*)
So it did. Then who—

LANCELOT
I don't care who it was; what I want to point out, right here and now, before we go any further, why, I'm in a position to say that I got some plans for my future life and I don't expect to have any intaference with 'em from my family, or from anybody that wants to *join* my family either. All up to now, I've spent my life in a dependent position, so to speak, but after what's happened here lately, and knowin' all the *things* I *do* know—

(*His voice has risen during this oration, and Jessie, after a glance to the left entrance, attempts to moderate him.*)

JESSIE
Hush! There's somebody—

LANCELOT
I don't care *who's* comin', I'm goin' to say my say. I expect to settle my own future in my own way, and any lady that I may decide to make *another* member of this family—

JESSIE
Hush!

(*The eyes of Lancelot follow hers to the left entrance and his stern manner is instantly softened.*)

LANCELOT
It's her.

(*Mrs. Curtis comes in, but stops uncertainly near the entrance.*)

MRS. CURTIS
Oh! I'm afraid I— (*She turns to go.*)

LANCELOT
Wait. I was just talkin' to 'em about you.

MRS. CURTIS
You were, Mr. Briggs?

LANCELOT (*to the others, reprovingly*)
She never calls me Lancelot. Missuz—Missuz Curtis, I didn't have to tell 'em; they'd already found out you were a widow. We don't need to bother about that anyway.

MRS. CURTIS
We don't?

LANCELOT
I've found out a good *many* things since I saw you, and I'm goin' to tell you the whole biznuss.

MRS. BRIGGS
Shame!

JESSIE (*with a despairing laugh*)
What would it matter? There's somebody *else* here that knows "the whole biznuss"!

MRS. CURTIS (*struck by this*)
What did you say, Miss Briggs?

INGOLDSBY (*warmly*)
She made a sensible remark, madam. There is a person concealed in this room—

MRS. CURTIS (*impulsively*)
Oh, dear! How did you know?

ALL THE OTHERS
What?

MRS. CURTIS
Nothing.

INGOLDSBY
All right! (*To Rupert.*) I think I know now where he is, and I'm going to have him out.

MRS. CURTIS (*gasping, then imploringly*)
Please stop!

INGOLDSBY (*halting*)
Why?

MRS. CURTIS (*weakly*)
It's a friend of mine.

LANCELOT (*apprehensively*)
A friend of yours?

MRS. CURTIS
I—I'll answer for him. He'll never mention—ah—anything. He really wouldn't be interested. He doesn't know any of you.

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE
No; and doesn't care to!

INGOLDSBY (*angrily*)
Now, I *will*—

MRS. CURTIS
Please don't!

INGOLDSBY
I mean to know who he is.

MRS. CURTIS (*pleading*)
Please! If you found him, you'd only see a total stranger to you. But he *wouldn't* be a

stranger to quite a lot of people in this hotel that *I* know.

INGOLDSBY (*now shaking his head*)
I'm afraid I don't see it.

MRS. CURTIS (*in a faltering voice*)
He's just here for one day and we—we didn't want anyone to know it. I had so many engagements I could only take a short walk in the country with him this morning and—and promise to meet him here at five this afternoon.

LANCELOT (*who has been staring at her painfully*)
But—but—see here!

MRS. CURTIS
Yes, I tried to get you to run away and dance with some nice young thing.

LANCELOT (*pathetically*)
So you could be here with—him?

MRS. CURTIS
I—I believe so.

LANCELOT (*dismally*)
Oh, my!

INGOLDSBY
Madam, what you say doesn't excuse this person's eavesdropping.

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE (*belligerently*)
Why doesn't it? A lady's got a right to keep her engagement a secret as long as she wants to, hasn't she? There are people in this hotel that would know all about it if they saw her with me. (*With some bitterness.*) That's why she said to meet her here, because it's so quiet!

INGOLDSBY
That doesn't excuse—

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE
It's more your fault than anybody else's. I was awake all last night on a noisy train, and I was quietly *asleep* here—till you woke me up.

INGOLDSBY
Till *who* woke you up?

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE
Till *you* did. I never knew a man that made so much noise about proposing a second marriage.

JESSIE (*amazed*)
Oh, Mamma!

MRS. BRIGGS (*with severe dignity*)
I'll speak to you and Mr. Rupert Smith after dinner. Henry, I don't see the propriety of continuing an argument with this interloper, whoever he may be. (*She takes Ingoldsby's arm.*)

JESSIE
No. Let's *do* get away from here! (*She moves toward the left entrance with Rupert.*)

INGOLDSBY (*looking back, as he follows with Mrs. Briggs; speaks reprovingly*)
I hope you have some shame for your conduct, sir.

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE
Bless you, my children!

INGOLDSBY (*infuriated*)
Now, I'll— (*He turns to go back.*)

MRS. BRIGGS (*restraining him*)
Henry!

(*They go on the left entrance. Jessie and Rupert have passed out into the corridor.*)

LANCELOT
Did he say "a lady's got a right to keep her—her *engagement*—a secret"?

MRS. CURTIS
Yes.

LANCELOT
To—to—to you?

MRS. CURTIS
Yes, dear.

LANCELOT (*piteously*)
Oh—oh, pshaw!

MRS. BRIGGS (*calling back*)
Lancelot!

LANCELOT (*meekly*)
Yes'm.

(*He goes dismally across to the left entrance and pauses. Ingoldsby and Mrs. Briggs have withdrawn, preceding him.*)

MRS. CURTIS (*as he pauses*)
What is it, Mr. Briggs?

LANCELOT (*swallowing*)
Noth—nothin'. (*He goes out.*)

MRS. CURTIS (*turning, after a moment's faintly smiling meditation*)
You poor thing!

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE (*in an aggrieved tone*)
Well, I should say I am!

(*She goes to the Philippine chair, near the right rear corner, and, moving a smaller chair close to it, seats herself and addresses the invisible person, who is evidently sitting in the shelter of the big chair.*)

MRS. CURTIS

After all, there's nobody else here just *now*, darling.

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE

No. We're alone, darling.

MRS. CURTIS

You poor darling!

(*She glances about, then impulsively leans behind the huge back of the Philippine chair as the curtain descends.*)

Dorothy's Neighbors

A brand new comedy in four acts, by Marie Doran, author of "The New Co-Ed," "Tempest and Sunshine," and many other successful plays. 4 males, 7 females. The scenes are extremely easy to arrange; two plain interiors and one exterior, a garden, or, if necessary, the two interiors will answer. Costumes modern. Plays 2½ hours.

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